

AMHERST COUNCIL ON AGING MINUTES
November 16, 2006

Members Present: Daniel Clapp, Elsie Fetterman, Doris Holden, Ed Kaler, Rosemary Kofler, Tom McAuley
Barbara Sutherland, Susan Whitbourne, David Yaukey

Absent: none

Select Board Liaison: Gerry Weiss

Staff Present: Nancy Pagano (Director/Program Director), Maura Plante (Assistant Director/Services) Karen Erman (Administrative Assistant), Marlene Barnett (Program Coordinator), Jeanette Miller

Guests: Al Byam, Marge Babb

Welcome:

Barbara Sutherland, Chair, called the Council on Aging meeting to order at 9:00 AM.

Minutes of September Meeting:

The minutes of the October 19, 2006 meeting were approved and accepted.

Senior Trust Treasurer's Report:

Doris distributed copies of the report. She reported one donation and a small increase in the value of the investments. The balance is \$606.45. The report was approved and accepted.

CONTINUING BUSINESS

Comprehensive Planning Committee Appointment:

Rosemary has volunteered to serve as the COA Representative to the CPC. She needs to be officially voted as such by the COA. Elsie moved that Rosemary be the official COA representative to the CPC. The move was seconded and unanimously approved.

A request was made to have another COA member fill in as needed if Rosemary was unable to attend a meeting. Doris volunteered.

PVTA-MV Update:

Nancy thanked Daniel and David for their dedicated help through the crisis by being on call, answering the phone and giving rides. The system to FAX requests from the Senior Center to MV if seniors have difficulty getting through the MV phone lines is still in place. The number of requests has lessened.

Ed gave a detailed report. He attended a Public Hearing in Northampton for people to air complaints about the MV service. He also attended a private meeting with Mary McGinnis, the new Administrator for PVTA, and others. The bottom line is that Mary McGinnis is poised and ready to change transporters. There are no penalties written into the contract with MV, but if Mary can get clear documentation from users of MV to prove that MV is not meeting the contract she can let them go. Ed also met with an attorney from the Disability Law Center in Boston and several others to come up with a recording document to give to people in the Pioneer Valley to help them document their experiences with the MV service. They want clear, honest documentation for a period of 3 weeks from 20 or more people who use MV service. That information will be analyzed and submitted to Mary McGinnis presumably by the end of December. Mary needs 10 serious complaints. The many anecdotal stories will also be used to show that MV broke their contract by not providing proper service. MV can be fired on the basis of not meeting their contract.

Meanwhile, MV claims that things are now going smoothly – they have all the drivers they need and all rides are filled. Mary knows of another company that she would hire if MV is fired – a company with an excellent reputation.

Al Byam stressed the importance of being specific with time and date on the documentation. He recommended that all documentation that is given to Mary should also be given to our local PVTA Board since they voted in favor of the contract with MV.

Ed gave out the PVTA complaint number: (413) 732-6248 X 229, 231 or 214. Be VERY specific about details.

Assessing unmet needs, parking:

Ed reported that the parking permit project which was started in April has been on hold due to the serious nature of the PVTA-MV service. Ed recommended an article in the Senior Spirit announcing a forum to bring people together to talk about any unmet needs (not just parking) for accessing ALL services at the Senior Center – an open discussion to generate ideas. Rosemary made a motion to proceed with the forum idea. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously. Ed will facilitate the forum on December 8 at 1:00 PM.

Ed said we need clear documentation of the parking need before going before the Select Board with a request. Gerry Weiss recommended beginning immediately with issuing a minimum number of parking permits to needy seniors while we gather information to evaluate the overall need. Ultimately the SB will want to know the fiscal implications of issuing more parking permits. It was decided to issue 5 permanent permits (for a specific car license) and 5 floating permits as a trial, to be used only at the Senior Center.

NEW BUSINESS

Budget Outlook:

Nancy said the town faces a \$3.3 million deficit. All town departments were instructed by Larry Shaffer, TM, to cut a certain percent from their budget. Nancy provided a handout. We have had to cut Center Activities, office supplies and most significantly Marlene's hours (from 4 to 3 days per week). In addition, Governor Romney proposes cutting our Formula Grant, which is money we use for very basic needs. Marlene's position as Program Coordinator is critical because she manages all of the volunteers plus assisting Nancy and Maura in their work. Even now the staff is generally in a crisis mode and very pressured with the work load – budget preparation, Newsletter preparation, Thanksgiving preparation, the MV crisis issues, the Counseling Center, HVES issues, etc., plus routine services. Seniors who were once grateful for our services now feel entitled and make demands. As the number of seniors increase and demands increase so does the stress level for the staff. Nancy expressed gratitude to the COA for their support and assistance during these trying times.

Gerry stated that Senator Rosenberg predicts that Romney's proposed cuts would probably be restored in the end of January.

Susan asked about the status of the Friends Group. She is eager to see fundraising re-established to help the Senior Center. Nancy explained that the proposal for the Friends Group is still in the hands of Town Counsel but people can make donations to the Senior Center in the meantime. Susan agreed to approach Town Counsel about the Friends Group status.

Elsie suggested that it would be useful for COA members to know the status of funds in the Senior Trust, The Senior Travel Club and the Senior Club. She asked that it be on the agenda for our next COA meeting.

SUB-COMMITTEE UPDATE

Comprehensive Planning Committee:

Rosemary reported that the CPC has elected new officers. The committee has been meeting weekly in preparation for the next step of forming Working Groups. About 500 people in the community (1.4%) attended the Idea Gathering sessions. The Working Groups will take the ideas generated at those sessions and develop goals, objectives and strategies for the Master Plan based on those ideas. In short, they will take the ideas and find a way to make them a reality. The first meeting of the seven Working Groups will take place December 12, 2006 with the ACP consultant, Jennifer Lindbom.

Highland Valley Elder Services:

Elsie said the meeting on November 6 was entirely about the details of the Fiscal Year 2006 audit.

COA STAFF REPORTS

Counseling Center Update:

Maura reported that the counseling center has started seeing elders and caregivers of elders. Four people are being seen and two people are on the waiting list. The counselors will receive a small stipend – this may help to increase their hours.

Senior Outreach Summary:

Marlene reported that a total of 21 seniors age 90 and above were interviewed in their homes (out of 192 in that age category living in Amherst). She distributed a handout tabulating the results. Twenty out of those 21 manage quite well living independently. The one thing that stood out among the respondents was the desire for more companionship – someone to accompany them to appointments, shopping, lunch or social outings, or just someone to visit with and discuss things with.

Gracie:

Nancy talked about the wonderful birthday gathering for Grace Thayer's 100th birthday. About 40 people came. Ellen Story, Stan Rosenberg and Larry Shafer had proclamations for her. Gracie now lives at the Fisher Hospice Home.

MCOA Conference Experience:

Nancy provided a handout with a summary of the highlights. She said it was a very renewing experience for those that attended and helpful to hear the views of others in the state. She expressed appreciation to the COA for funding those that attended.

Ed expressed deep thanks to the Senior Center staff for all their hard work.

The COA meeting was adjourned at 10:30 AM.

The next COA meeting will be held on December 14, 2006 at 9:00 AM.

Respectfully submitted,
Rosemary Kofler, Secretary